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## Stem cell hope, hype, and hypocrisy according to Arthur Caplan

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Ethicist Arthur Caplan had an excellent piece about stem cell hype last week on Science Progress, a publication of the Center for American Progress. Caplan is Director of the Center for Bioethics and the Sidney D. Caplan Professor of Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania.

He starts by saying that yes, some have over-hyped the promise of stem cell research, saying:

“ Anyone who has followed my advocacy for embryonic stem cell research would know I have long been critical of claims that funding today means people tomorrow will leap from their wheelchairs and walk.

However, he goes on to say that some of the most over-hyped claims in stem cell research come from those who oppose work with human embryonic stem cells. His list includes:

- Hyped claim #5: The Bush "compromise"
- Hyped claim #4: Adult stem cells can do it all
- Hyped claim #3: If embryonic stem cell research is so promising, then why isn't private research behind it?
- Hyped claim #2: IPS cells are the magical solution to the embryonic stem cell quandary
- Hyped claim #1: Frozen embryos should be put up for adoption rather than used as sources of stem cell lines. Of this hype, Caplan adds:

“ While I am on this particular bit of hype, I should add that those who do not favor the use of unwanted and certain-to-be-destroyed frozen embryos languishing in clinics worldwide never ever say what they propose be done with them. Conservatives say destruction is unthinkable, however, since it is inevitable then what are they talking about? ( I suppose this constitutes hypocrisy and not hype.)

His arguments regarding items on the list are worth a read. He says:

“ There is plenty more hype to be had from what has passed as debate over the past decade or so since human embryonic stem cells were first isolated. I don't mean to suggest that most of the hype has come from critics rather than proponents. I do mean to suggest, however, that those who live in very fragile houses often constructed of hype ought not be quick to cast stones. CIRM funds work with adult stem cells and iPS cells in addition to embryonic stem cells because until people in wheel chairs can get up and walk it's too soon to start ruling out therapeutic options.

- A.A.

Tags: hype, iPS, Caplan, adult stem cell, embryonic stem cell

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